



January 31, 2017

## Mentoring event teaches employees how to engage millennials at work and form winning teams

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Citing a "trust chasm" between baby boomers and millennials, author/entrepreneur Kelly Riggs tells employees, "Leadership is influence. I can't influence you if you don't trust me." Riggs spoke at NAVAIR's National Mentoring Month event Jan. 24 with a theme of "Millennial Matters." (U.S. Navy photo)

NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND, PATUXENT RIVER, Md. — Baby boomers and millennials may seem worlds apart, but all they both really want is respect.

"Respect is the key. Both generations really care about respect — we just define it differently," explained Kelly S. Riggs, a two-time national Salesperson of the Year, author and executive coach who spoke at NAVAIR's National Mentoring Month event, "Mentoring: Millennial Matters," held here Jan. 24. "Mutual respect is the cornerstone of success."

Riggs, together with his millennial son, Robby Riggs, founded CounterMentors, a movement aimed at exploring and using the unique strengths and perspectives each generation brings to the workplace.

Riggs said the U.S. is approaching a four-generation workforce, and currently, the 53 million millennials working in the U.S. comprise the largest section of the workforce. As of January 2017, the average NAVAIR civilian age is 46.3.

"Every generation that comes into the workplace is different. A natural antipathy is created



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inside the workplace,” Riggs said, suggesting it’s the managers who need to adapt their leadership styles and increase employee engagement to draw out the potential in their teams.

“It is our job as leaders to identify the strengths of whoever works for us and to adapt to that as leaders so we can create the best possible team,” he said. “If you have an underperforming team, it’s not your team’s fault — it’s your fault.”

### ***The millennial divide***

In general, typical millennials, born between 1981 to 1998, and also known as Generation Y, share the following characteristics, Riggs said:

- Want a more collaborative, rather than a competitive, workplace
- Believe in community and connection
- Change jobs far more frequently than older generations
- Are used to having their voices heard and receiving feedback
- Want to own their own business or work for someone who will mentor, train, coach and develop them
- Value flexibility, purpose, career development and the freedom to make their own choices
- Are the least engaged at work, according to a Gallup poll

To increase millennials’ engagement, happiness and, therefore, productivity at work, Riggs suggests setting clear expectations during the hiring process and repeating them on the first day. These expectations should include a specific, desired outcome, an agreed upon timeframe and an explanation of the “why” or purpose.

“Purpose means everything [to millennials],” Riggs said. “They are very cause-driven. They want to be a part of something. If you don’t create something like that in your organization, you’re going to struggle mightily. Clear and aligned expectations are fundamental to resolving conflict and creating a culture of accountability.”

Engaged employees will then trust and respect their managers and become personally accountable for their work — “owning the results, rather than making excuses or blaming others,” Riggs said. He listed three steps to creating a culture of accountability:

- Set clear expectations for the desired results.
- Review those expectations consistently.
- Address performance issues.

“For the first time in history, the newest generation has something to offer to the workplace that does not exist,” Riggs said. “Millennials know more about the Internet, technology,



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social media and connectivity than many of us do today. So have a personal conversation with them. Ask, 'How can I help you be more successful?' Millennials really want to grow and develop and do something meaningful."

### ***Honoring NAVAIR's mentors***

The winners of NAVAIR's 2016 Mentor of the Year Award were also recognized at the event for their exemplification of the qualities and character of a mentor:

- Cherry Point, North Carolina: Mark Meno
- China Lake, California: Cameron Bruce
- Jacksonville, Florida: [Sadell Crump](#)
- Lakehurst, New Jersey: [John Melin](#)
- Orlando, Florida: Hoang Doan
- Patuxent River: Robert B. Smith
- Point Mugu, California: Terence Jenkins
- San Diego, California: Jeri Perez and James Patricola (Naval Air Technical Data and Engineering Service Center)

NAVAIR Commander Vice Adm. Paul Grosklags advised the more than 400 employees who attended the event to think about three things when interacting with their mentors or mentees:

- Critical thinking: "We have stopped giving thought to the way we execute business. What would you do differently? What would you change?"
- Empowerment
- The value of diversity in mentoring

Grosklags urged employees to reach out to those with different perspectives.

"Learn something from someone not in your inner circle, someone who may look at the world differently," he said. "Too often, we find ourselves wrapped in our own little cocoon of comfort. Part of this is about diversity; part of this is about inclusion. It's about learning from each other, so don't pass up those opportunities."

NAVAIR's Mentoring Program, established in 2007, offers speed and group mentoring, training, a playbook and an online tool, iMentor, to help match mentors with mentees. Currently, there are more than 5,000 mentors and more than 6,000 mentees registered in iMentor.



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"I believe I have gotten an extreme amount of value from just being in the room with folks like you, folks not like you, and folks with vastly different opinions on what is important to the Navy and to the U.S.," NAVAIR Commander Vice Adm. Paul Grosklags said at a national Mentoring Month event Jan. 24, urging employees to seek informal and formal mentors and expand their networks. (U.S. Navy photo)